

ACT NOW

Let Donna Shalala know
that you
want her
to protect
your
Right to
Know!



Donna Shalala
Secretary, H.H.S.
200 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Email: hhs@mail@os.dhhs.gov

Dear Secretary Shalala,

I am writing to express my concern about the possible weakening of labeling requirements for irradiated food that is being considered by the Food and Drug Administration. I strongly believe that it is my right to know if the food I serve my family has been treated with radiation.

77% of Americans do not want to buy irradiated food. It is the government's role to protect consumers, not assist the meat industry in their efforts to trick us. Please defend the consumer's right to know.

Bonnie Kendrick

Thank you
for your good spirit & work.

Your Name

This is the
symbol for
irradiated
food.

Without a
written de-
scription

most consumers would have
no idea what it means.



Preventing *E. coli* infection

While the government must have and enforce strong food safety standards, here are some guidelines for what you can do to insure safe food.

* Cook all ground beef and hamburger thoroughly. Because ground beef can turn brown before disease-causing bacteria are killed, use a digital instant-read meat thermometer, cooking until the thickest part reads at least 160° F.

* If you are served an undercooked hamburger or other ground beef product in a restaurant, send it back for further cooking. You may want to ask for a new bun and a clean plate, too.

* Avoid spreading harmful bacteria in your kitchen. Keep raw meat separate from ready-to-eat foods. Wash hands, counters, and utensils with hot soapy water after they touch raw meat. Never place cooked hamburgers or ground beef on the unwashed plate that held raw patties. Wash meat thermometers in between tests of patties that require further cooking.

* Drink only pasteurized milk, juice, or cider. Commercial juice with an extended shelf-life that is sold at room temperature (e.g. juice in cardboard boxes, or vacuum sealed juice in glass containers) has been pasteurized, although this is generally not indicated on the label. Juice concentrates are also heated sufficiently to kill pathogens.

* Wash fruits and vegetables thoroughly, especially those that will not be cooked.

* Drink municipal water that has been treated with chlorine or other effective disinfectants.

* Avoid swallowing lake or pool water while swimming.

* Make sure that persons with diarrhea, especially children, wash their hands carefully with soap after bowel movements and that people wash their hands after changing soiled diapers.

The Problems of Irradiated Foods

Quality of Food Damaged

Foods that have been exposed to ionizing radiation have second-rate nutrition and "counterfeit" freshness. Even at low doses, some irradiated foods lose 20% of vitamins such as A, C, E, and B complex. Because irradiation breaks down the food's cell walls, accelerated vitamin losses occur during storage--up to 80%. Ironically, irradiation both creates harmful free radicals and destroys the antioxidant vitamins necessary to fight them! When electron beams are used, trace amounts of radioactivity may be created.

Toxic Byproducts Produced

Ionizing radiation knocks electrons out of atoms and creates free radicals. These free radicals react with food components, creating new radiolytic products, some of which are toxic (benzene, formaldehyde, lipid peroxides) and some of which may be unique to irradiated foods. No one knows the long term impact of eating unknown quantities of these damaged foods. Studies on animals fed irradiated foods have shown increased tumors, reproductive failures and kidney damage.

Long Term Effectiveness

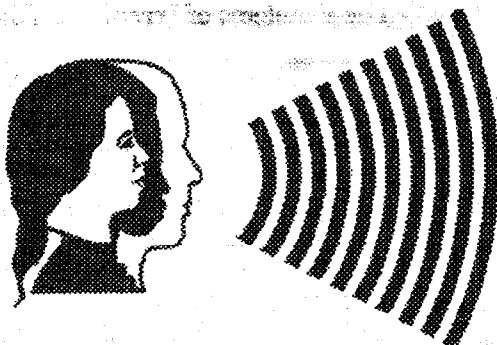
Irradiation doesn't kill all bacteria; those that survive are radiation-resistant. Eventually these bacteria will require higher doses of radiation. Irradiation doesn't kill the bacterium that causes botulism, or viruses. It can't be used on dairy products, a major source of food poisoning.

Covers Up Problems

Irradiation is not the only option for providing clean food. Cleaning up filthy slaughter houses, slowing down processing lines, increasing the number of federal meat inspectors, and encouraging local agriculture instead of factory farming will lead to long-term food safety solutions without the risks of irradiation.

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Your Right To Know Threatened

The Consumers' Voice

P.O. Box 84010, Lincoln NE 68501

Recently the Department of Agriculture added meat to the list of foods that it allows to be irradiated. Since 77% of Americans say they would refuse to eat food exposed to nuclear material, until now, food has rarely been irradiated. As part of their effort to get you to eat irradiated foods, the meat industry is attempting to convince the Food and Drug Administration to remove the labeling requirement, removing the public's right to know and choose.

Food irradiation is a process by which meat, fruit, vegetables and other food products are exposed to large doses of ionizing radiation. When radiation strikes food material, it transfers its energy, changing the molecular structure of food, leaving positively and negatively charged particles called ions or "free radicals." The ions are chemically active and easily recombine or initiate chemical reactions with surrounding materials.

The move to introduce irradiated food is part of a misguided effort to eliminate bacteria such as *E.coli* and extend the shelf life of food. Food irradiation raises con-

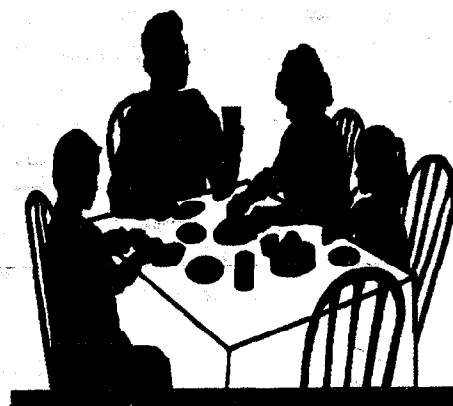
cerns that include long-term health impacts, environmental problems, nuclear accidents, the public's right to know and worker safety. The root causes of food-borne illness are filthy conditions at factory farms and industrial slaughterhouses. Irradiation will not compensate for unhealthy and inappropriate food processing procedures that leave feces on the meat.

However, irradiation will:

- * Reduce the nutritional quality of food, specifically decreasing vitamins A, C, E and some B complex vitamins.
- * Make older food look newer.
- * Create a new class of unique radiolytic products such as benzene, a known carcinogen.
- * Create new volumes of toxic radioactive waste.

In a recent poll 92% of Americans said they want irradiated food to be labeled. Like other labels required by federal law, irradiation labels must be truthful and not misleading. However, through such outlets as Wal-Mart, the grocery and meat in-

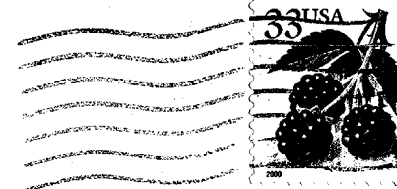
dustry is in the midst of a campaign to confuse the public into thinking that irradiated food carries safety benefits that outweigh the risks. Wal-Mart's attempt to advertise irradiated food as "safe" is a complete distortion. Proposals to use euphemistic phrases like "cold pasteurization" are inappropriate because pasteurization is an entirely different process involving rapid heating and cooling.



"The bottom line is that food irradiation is not in the public interest," says Wenonah Hauter, Chair of the Advisory Committee on Food Safety. "Wal-Mart and others should focus their efforts on real improvements of food processing procedures."



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